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SENSITIVE

E.O. 12958: N/A

TAGS: [PGOV](#) [PREL](#) [PHUM](#) [KDEM](#) [KPAO](#) [SO](#)

SUBJECT: SOMALIA - VOA Somali Service Banned in Puntland

11. (SBU) Summary: On the evening of October 1, the regional Government of Puntland, in two separate edicts, banned FM radio stations in Puntland from carrying Voice of America's (VOA) Somali Service and banned journalists from carrying out their work for VOA. The suspension remains in effect as of mid-day October 6. Post is engaged with the Government of Puntland in an effort to reverse the suspension. End summary.

Motives for Suspension

12. (SBU) On October 1, the Government of Puntland's Minister of Security, Dr. Abdullahi Si'id Samata, ordered all FM stations to cease broadcasting Voice of America's (VOA) Somali Service programs. The letter, an informal translation of which Post forwarded to AF and VOA, further stated that "To ensure adherence to this order, the security agents and regional heads are being instructed to ensure full compliance." The letter claimed that on August 29, VOA had falsely alleged that some Somali politicians were detained in Galkacyo, which the Minister said was "purely untrue." "The intention [of the VOA report] was to destabilize the security of Puntland ...," the Minister continued. The letter also cited a September 30 report claiming that the moderate Islamic group Ahlu Sunna wal Jama'a (ASWJ) had set up an office in Garowe, which the Government of Puntland apparently found objectionable.

13. (SBU) On the same day, the Deputy Minister of Information, Abdishakur Mire Adan, issued a letter banning three reporters -Nuuh Muse Birjeeb, Mohamed Yasin Isak, and Abdikadir Mohamed Nunow- from reporting for VOA in Puntland. The letter further stated that "This order will also affect anyone else attempting to do reporting for VOA within Puntland Region."

14. (SBU) Post registered directly with the Office of the President of Puntland our concern about the closure. Late in the evening of October 5, the Government of Puntland e-mailed a letter (forwarded to AF) stating that the suspension was due to VOA reporters having "violated [the] code of conduct of news broadcasting in Puntland by selectively interviewing anti-law-and-order individuals and politically motivated elements ..."

Reactions

15. (SBU) The Committee to Protect Journalists (CPJ), the National Union of Somali Journalists (NUSOJ), and Reporters Without Borders issued statements condemning the closure. All cited the threat to freedom of the press, with no specific focus on VOA as a U.S. government-supported media outlet. The owner of one of VOA Somali Service's FM partners condemned the Puntland Administration's

decision, but stated that he had no choice but to comply, fearing that his equipment and station would be destroyed in retaliation for continuing to broadcast VOA. The same station is filling the time formerly used to broadcast VOA with debates about freedom of the press and discussions about the motives of this action against VOA. For its part, VOA issued a statement on October 5 condemning the closure.

Post Response

16. (SBU) At the request of VOA, the Somalia Unit has made no public statement to date. However, we have registered our concern with the Puntland Administration. In an October 5 meeting with Somalia Unit, Puntland's Minister for Women said she was encouraging President "Farooole" not to permanently close VOA, but she insisted that the ban was necessary to show VOA that it should not report on "unhelpful and dangerous things." In an October 6 conversation, President "Farooole's" Chief of Staff insisted that the banned VOA reporters were "not professional," and that their broadcasts were filled with inaccuracies. He hoped that VOA would replace the ousted reporters with staff that were less "linked to their clan," and that VOA would be "more impartial" in the future. We asked that our concerns over the ban be passed to President "Farooole," and underlined the importance the USG attaches to freedom of the press. We requested that "Farooole," who could not be reached by telephone on October 6, be available for a telephone call on October 7.
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